

Arthur DeSisto
Total Wine & More
Testimony for General Law Committee
February 26 2013 Public Hearing

Good Afternoon, Senator Doyle, Representative Baram and members of the Committee. My name is Arthur DeSisto and I have the pleasure of being the wine manager at Total Wine & More in Norwalk. I am here today to offer testimony in support of four bills on your agenda today:

- **HB 6210: An act allowing package stores to sell cigars.**
- **HB 6211: An act concerning the offering and tasting of distilled spirits**
- **HB 6212: An act concerning wine tasting at package stores**
- **HB 6361: An act concerning fair alcohol pricing**

Total Wine & More is owned and operated by two brothers, David and Robert Trone, who believe in ensuring the best price and best selection for our customers. We opened our first Connecticut location just 3 months ago. We are excited about our first Connecticut store. We strive to be the price leader for our customers in every market we serve. Our Norwalk Store is part of the Total Wine family that includes 89 stores in 15 states. We become active in the communities we serve and we believe in investing in these communities. Last year, we donated over 3 million worth of in-kind goods to more than 2,000 organizations nationwide.

When we opened this past December, we brought more than 50 jobs to the state of Connecticut; and over 75 percent of these jobs are full-time with benefits. Our employees receive over 150 hours of training. We have an educated workforce whose main focus is customer choice, best price and highest selection.

Total Wine & More's Norwalk store currently offers more than 8,000 wines, 3,000 spirits and 2, 500 beers, including something we take great pride in: locally produced *Connecticut* products. We showcase Connecticut's best offerings and market Connecticut's home products unlike any other store.

All four of the bills we are testifying on will help our business continue to grow. As of now, we are prohibited and handicapped from serving our customers in the best possible manner.

On the specific bills:

- **HB 6210: An act allowing package stores to sell cigars**

Connecticut is home to the finest shade grown tobacco in the world and several of the greatest cigar wrapper companies; such as Enfield's Jarmoc tobacco and Brown's Harvest in Windsor. The Brown family has been growing tobacco in Windsor, Connecticut since 1874. We want to offer our customers the best cigar products possible. We were surprised to learn that we could not sell and promote a local Connecticut business in our own state and stores.

- **HB 6211: An act concerning the offering and tasting of distilled spirits**

- **HB 6212: An act concerning wine tasting at package stores**

As for the two separate proposed tasting bills, one for wine and one for spirits, we feel that the tastings of all three classes of beverage alcohol: beer, wine and spirits-should be unlimited. We are currently limited to the number of bottles that can be open at one time. We can open only four bottles at one time across all three beverage classes. Limiting a tasting to only four open bottles severely restricts the customer's ability to taste what he or she wants.

We are aware that other stores already stretch the number of bottles for a tasting, realizing how impractical the four bottle limit is. We prefer to work through the correct legislative process to correct this archaic law.

If there are concerns over consumption issues, there shouldn't be-because this is a tasting, not a drinking opportunity. We address this fear by the size of the tastings and the aggregate amount that the taster may be provided.

- **HB 6361: An act concerning fair alcohol pricing**

Lastly, Connecticut is the only state in the country with a minimum pricing system. Currently, the state sets the lowest price that can be charged for a single bottle of alcohol, regardless if it is bought as a single bottle or a case.

Connecticut heavily regulates our industry to a point that restricts and hampers natural competition. It's competition that would bring the prices down, and therefore, help the consumer. We all know many Connecticut residents are heading to our border states to buy alcohol at a lower price-some have estimated this to be a loss of \$2.6 million in taxes.

It's the consumers who should be leading the charge here-thank you for allowing me to testify before you today in support of proposals that help Connecticut become more competitive with New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.